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ABSTRACT

It has been suggested (Labbo, 2000) that CD-ROM "electronic talking books" may be helpful in supporting the literacy development of young children. However, teachers are often short of strategies for using these relatively new resources. In this paper based on a workshop, the strategies suggested by Labbo and others are investigated. Problems teachers may face in implementing these strategies are also discussed, as are some possible solutions to these problems. (RS)

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THINGS YOUNG CHILDREN CAN DO WITH AN ELECTRONIC TALKING BOOK ... MAYBE

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Paper presented at the Joint National Conference of the Australian Association for the Teaching of English and the Australian Literacy Educators' Association (Hobart Tasmania Australia, 12-15 July 2001).

ABSTRACT

It has been suggested (Labbo, 2000) that CD-ROM 'electronic talking books' may be helpful in supporting the literacy development of young children. However, teachers are often short of strategies for using these relatively new resources. In this workshop, the strategies suggested by Labbo, and others, are investigated. Problems teachers may face in implementing these strategies are also discussed, as are some possible solutions to these problems.

KEY WORDS

Education, Literacy, CD-ROMs, IMM, Multimedia, Talking Books, Electronic Story Books, Reading, Early Childhood, Primary

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WHAT ARE ELECTRONIC TALKING BOOKS?

Electronic talking books are usually stories that are backed up with a sound track, graphics, and often animation. Most allow silent reading, although the reader can usually opt to hear the story read out loud by a fluent reader. Indeed, sometimes there's a choice of narrators. The text is often highlighted as it is read by the narrator, allowing the child to follow along. By clicking on a particular word, the child can often access its pronunciation and often a definition, or even a picture.

WHAT THINGS CAN YOUNG CHILDREN DO WITH ELECTRONIC TALKING BOOKS?

It has often been stated that electronic talking books can be highly motivating to primary school children (Collins, Hammond & Wellington, 1997), but many teachers seem are not sure how to use them in their classrooms. There is increasing evidence that children need a degree of guidance from teachers or parents when using electronic talking books. For example, children do not spontaneously talk about the electronic talking books they have read, and nor do they use the support features available in consistent, predictable ways.

Linda Labbo (2000) has suggested several potentially very useful strategies for using CD-ROM talking books to help children achieve literacy. These include simply listening to the story for enjoyment, reading along with the story, partner reading in digital reader's theatre, searching for known words and letters, and looking for rhymes and sounds.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL PROBLEMS AND LIMITATIONS OF USING CD-ROM TALKING BOOKS TO SUPPORT YOUNG CHILDREN'S LITERACY LEARNING?

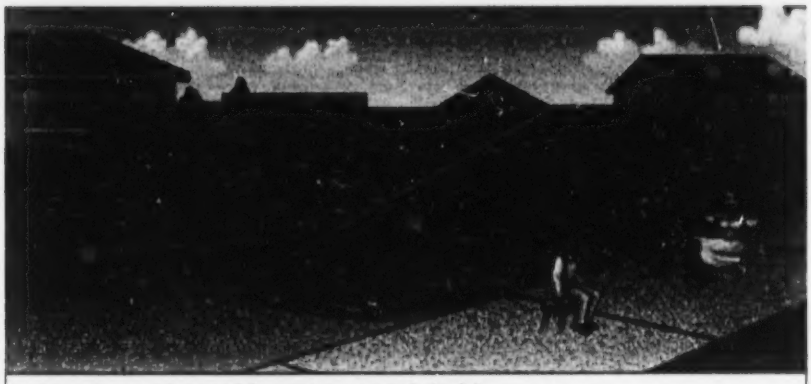
Although the above strategies and others may be very useful, there are limitations teachers may need to be aware of if they are to plan valuable learning experiences with minimal frustration. Teachers need to be aware of the potential difficulties relating to:

- Technology – Software and Hardware
- Teaching Strategies
- Classroom Management

WHAT CAN TEACHERS DO TO MAKE THE USE OF ELECTRONIC TALKING BOOKS MORE USEFUL AND RELEVANT TO YOUNG CHILDREN?

Teacher-made talking books may be one means of increasing the appeal and relevance of talking books to young children. Through the use of simple software packages such as *Hyperstudio* and *Storybook Weaver Deluxe*, or more advanced packages such as *Illuminatus*, teachers can scribe children's own stories or experiences – an electronic version of Language Experience. These texts can be illustrated with sound effects, pictures drawn by the children, and even video clips. The children can often provide the spoken narration.

Children can then independently reread these stories as many times as they like.



He ran home to get his mammy and daddy.

Picture 1. A simple story dictated and recorded by a three year old girl, using *Storybook Weaver Deluxe*.

CONCLUSION

It seems that electronic talking books may play a role in early literacy learning. However, this is still an under-researched area and teachers need to be creative, flexible and reflective if they are to use this technology successfully.

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